

Appendix H:

Workshop Opening Speech

Carol Pynchon

Convenor and Village of Canton Trustee

June 16, 2015

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My name is Carol Pynchon – I am a trustee of the Village of Canton, I serve on Village Sustainability Committee, and I’m a member of the GardenShare Board of Directors.

But my friend Jill always tells me my greatest strength and life role is to be a Connector! I am not an expert on local food issues, economic development, or place making. But I know a lot of people who are – and many of you are in this room. My interest and role here is and has been to help get you all together – to connect you in one room – to talk about making Canton a more livable, healthy, and vibrant community by building and strengthening our local food economy.

Last July – thanks to some connecting – I found myself at the St. Lawrence bookstore with GardenShare’s then director and local food systems guru Aviva Gold and St. Lawrence Sustainability Semester Director Cathy Shrady contemplating a local food technical assistance grant. They were offering technical support to develop and implement action plans promoting local food and downtown revitalization. Yeah, we thought, we really could use that!

As we all know, Canton is the county seat of St. Lawrence County, and one of the poorest counties in New York State outside New York City. We have the third highest rate of heart disease in the state, and the highest obesity level (a distinction we share with two neighboring counties). Nearly 8 percent of our North Country neighbors have diabetes, costing us \$42 million annually. In Canton, a quarter of our children are food insecure, and nearly ten percent of our households get by on less than \$10,000 per year.

While it is clear that people are having a hard time making healthy food choices, agriculture is our largest industry, for the most part represented by large dairy operations as the small dairies have either grown, or failed. Conversion to a more diversified agricultural economy has been slow, despite the fact that we have hundreds of thousands of underutilized acres in our sprawling 2,600-square-mile county. We do have vegetable producers who have developed from being primarily direct-market farmers to farmers who sell in diverse markets and whose farms support a reasonable lifestyle.

And our community boasts an amazing base of resources, organizations, programs, and stakeholders interested in developing our local food system and increasing access to healthy food choices. You were all invited to participate in this brainstorming and planning event because you represent those resources, organization, and initiatives.

You represent our Village’s new, robust, and engaged Sustainability Committee, which includes a subcommittee that focuses on issues related to food and agriculture. You are here from St. Lawrence University and SUNY Canton, Canton Central School, United Helpers, and Canton Potsdam Hospital – all strong institutions taking the lead in our community. You are here representing Cooperative Extension, which offers both farmer education based on community needs and nutrition education based on the needs of our low-income community. You are our planners and economic developers; you are farmers and producers and downtown Canton business owners. Some of us represent GardenShare, a nonprofit organization working to address hunger in our community and build a robust, equitable and environmentally sound local food system. Some of you

have been involved in North Country Grown Cooperative and other efforts to process and aggregate local farm products for market. Still others of you are, or represent, the government officials and agencies that support – and we hope fund! – our efforts.

We are together tonight – and have been working together for years – to put all those pieces together so our farmers and producers can make a living, we can all enjoy healthy, locally grown food, and our local economy can thrive.

But here's the problem, as we explained in our application for this technical assistance project: Our community understands the value of local food and agriculture to the local economy, but we have yet to reap the economic benefits we believe should be resulting. We have the pieces in place – you all know them, you *are* them – but as we sat around the coffee table just about a year ago hashing out our application, we recognized and articulated our need for help to better tie together the resources we have, identify the major missing pieces, and build a plan to bridge that gap.

That is our goal tonight and tomorrow: to share our stories and ideas and to develop action plans that will help us create a vibrant local economy built on our local food systems.

Before I introduce our technical assistance team, I'd like to recognize the steering committee for this project. These individuals, who represent the stakeholders I mentioned earlier, held several phone meetings with our team to offer them a snapshot of the issues and realities facing us here in Canton. Joining me on the steering committee are:

Patrick Ames, Executive Director of Cooperative Extension
Todd Amo, Administrator, Maplewood/United Helpers
Cindy Atkins, Director of Dining and Conference Services at St. Lawrence University
Zoe Baker, Canton Farmers Market Manager
Rainbow Crabtree, Owner of Nature's Storehouse and coordinator of the Canton Merchants Association
John Dewar, President, North Country Grown Cooperative
Gloria McAdam, Executive Director, GardenShare
Jason Pfothenauer, St. Lawrence County Planning Office
Leigh Rodriguez, Economic Development Director, Village of Canton
Lenore VanderZee, Executive Director for University Relations, SUNY Canton
Bob Washo, Producer, littleGrasse Foodworks; Chair, Canton Sustainability Committee

In addition to thanking the committee for their input and insight over the last months of planning, I'd like to thank my friends here at TAUNY for welcoming us into this wonderful community space for our gathering. To be clear, we are thrilled to have the technical expertise provided by this initiative...but it came with *no budget!* We are lucky to have a place like The TAUNY Center where groups like us can gather to talk about and contribute to the vitality of our wonderful community. Thank you, TAUNY!